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SUBJECT: IRAQI LEADERS REACT TO POTUS VISIT

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARGARET SCOBAY FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Bush's June 13 visit to Baghdad was well-received by most of Iraq's political leadership. Sunni Arab reaction has thus far been positive, with some welcoming the opportunity to discuss security issues with the President and others calling the meeting "inspiring." The two Sadrist ministers invited, however, did not attend the meeting, and denounced President Bush's visit as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty because GOI did not even know President Bush was in the country. Tawafuq leader Ala'a Makki told Poloff on June 17 that PM Maliki was unhappy with remarks made by DPM Salam al-Zawbaie. This contributed to their already frosty relations. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Deputy President Tarik Hashimi told Poloff after his meeting with President Bush that he appreciated the opportunity to review Sunni Arab security concerns. In a similar vein, Speaker Mahmud Mashadani told Poloff before his meeting that he intended to raise the issue of the expected MNF assault in Anbar asking that military action be stayed in favor of negotiations in order to reduce civilian casualties. Sheikh Khalaf Alayan (National Dialogue Council), who had appeared somewhat uncomfortable sharing a room with Ayad Allawi, Rowsch Shaways (KDP), SCIRI politico Hummam Hammoudi, and Fadhila Party leader Abd-al-Rahman al-Husseini, during his meeting with the President, nevertheless told Poloff that the meeting was good.

¶3. (C) Tawafuq leader Ala'a Makki told Poloff on June 17 that Tawafuq was working on repairing relations between PM Maliki and Tawafuq DPM Salam al-Zawbaie. According to Makki, relations between the two were frosty and worsened after the Ministerial meeting with President Bush. Makki said that the PM was unhappy with Zawbaie's remarks at the gathering, but offered no further specifics.

¶4. (C) On June 14, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Rafi al-Esawi (IIP) lamented that security surrounding the President's visit did not allow ministers time to prepare issues for discussion. He said the most important thing that happened at this meeting was that President Bush looked us in the eyes and said, "Each one of you has my full support." He considered the moment "legitimizing and inspiring."

¶5. (C) A range of senior Shia political figures over the past five days told PolOffs they believe the President's visit gave a real boost to Prime Minister Maliki. Mohammad Ismael al-Kuzai of the Fadhila Party told Pol/FSN President Bush's visit as "a great step," and added that it "showed the world the U.S. is still committed to supporting the GOI." He also applauded the timing of the visit, saying it was good to arrive after the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,

which he said was a great victory for the U.S. and Iraq against the insurgency.

¶6. (C) Embassy officers escorting participants out of the building after their meetings with the President reported upbeat, energized reactions. For example, Sheikh Khalid al-Attayah, Shia Deputy Speaker of Parliament, who appeared morose during his enforced wait with Sunni Arab Speaker Mashadani - with whom he clearly lacks rapport - left the meeting smiling broadly. He made PolOff promise to secure for him a copy of the photo with the President.

¶7. (SBU) The two Sadrism ministers who were invited did not attend. Sadrism Minister of Health Ali al-Shamari told Pol/FSN that the next day, at the end of the June 14 session of the Council of Representatives (COR) Sadrism Parliamentarian Saleh Hassan Essa denounced President Bush's visit as a violation of Iraq's sovereignty. Essa complained that not even the Iraqi Prime Minister knew about the POTUS visit beforehand. He then called on the COR to formally protest the visit. In the al-Kadhimiya district of Baghdad, Imam Hazim al-Araji, former MNF-I detainee and brother of Sadrism CoR member Baha al-Araji, led demonstrations on June 14 protesting President Bush's visit.
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